



# Catholic Faith, Life & Creed

Doctrinal Catechesis Sessions for adults based on  
the Church Year, the Liturgy, & the Sunday Scriptures

## Breaking Open the Word

by Mary Birmingham

# Fourth Sunday of Lent A



"Jesus Heals the Man born Blind," El Greco  
Print available for free use: <http://freechristimages.org>



## Begin with the Sign of the Cross

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Amen.

### Opening Prayer

Option 1. Use Opening Prayer from the Sunday Liturgy.

Option 2.

### Prayer in Preparation for Baptism and in Preparation for Renewing Baptismal Promises

Almighty God, who rules all things,  
we hasten with eager steps to the venerable font of eternal salvation,  
and ask you, Magnificent God,  
that you command this font which has been sealed  
may be reopened with the keys of your mercy,  
and impart to those that thirst a most sweet cup of water.  
May the voice of your divinity sound upon these waters,  
may the Spirit of your sanctification dwell therein  
and bring healing to all ills.  
May the abundant streams of paradise flow from it,  
that by your goodness heavenly graces  
may be bestowed upon these new-born children.

We ask this through Christ our Lord.

Liber Ordium. *Monumenta Ecclesiae Liturgica*, edd. Cabrol and  
Leclercq, Vol. 5, ed. Dom M. Ferotin, Paris, 1904.

Catholic  
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Breaking Open the  
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## Liturgical Context

- ▶ Today is the Fourth Sunday of Lent. God's incredible reconciling mercy is the theme of today's Gospel.
- ▶ Scrutinies are celebrated with those who are preparing for baptism (elect) at the Easter season. There are three scrutinies. The first scrutiny is celebrated on the Third Sunday of Lent, the second scrutiny is celebrated on the Fourth Sunday of Lent, and the third scrutiny is celebrated on the Fifth Sunday of Lent. Scrutinies are penitential celebrations that help uncover what is still in need of reconciliation and healing in the elect as they prepare for baptism. Cycle A readings are used for the celebration of scrutinies.
- ▶ David is anointed in today's first reading. Anointing in Scripture meant to touch a person with a substance. That substance could be water, spittle, fat, oil, blood, or mud). Anointing is the heart of our sacramental life.
- ▶ See Word and Worship Workbook Year A or Year C for a thorough treatment of today's readings and liturgy.

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface insights in the wider group. (@Five to seven minutes)

- ▶ What spoke to your heart in today's liturgy?
- ▶ What reading, symbol, music, homily, spoke to you and why did it speak to you?
- ▶ What touched you the most in today's Gospel?

If time is a consideration, omit reflection on one or both of the readings. (You may want to concentrate on the Gospel alone.)

## First reading: 1 Samuel 16: 6-7, 10-13

- ▶ God chooses David to be king.
- ▶ God chooses the unlikely David from among Jesse's sons to be king.
- ▶ God chooses whom God wills. God elects his people. People can do nothing on their own merit to achieve God's election.
- ▶ God anointed David, thus signaling the power and presence of God's Spirit in guiding and leading David as king.
- ▶ Anointing effectively commissioned a person for special service. David was called into God's service.
- ▶ God called him and thus David enjoyed God's special protection.
- ▶ God was elected, so too have the elect been chosen by God. The scrutinies today remind us of that election as they prepare for baptism.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, then surface brief insights in the wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #1 for an example.

- ▶ To what is God calling you in your life? When has God ever called you?
- ▶ How does it feel to be elected, chosen by God?

### Second Reading: Ephesians 5: 8-14

- ▶ The Ephesians’ community struggled with Gnostic influences.
- ▶ Today’s reading highlights the struggle between light and darkness.
- ▶ The reading suggests that Christians must turn completely toward the light—metanoia—a complete conversion of heart.
- ▶ Some scholars suggest that this was used in a baptismal liturgy because of the images of light and darkness that permeate the text.



## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in groups of two, surface brief insights in wider group. Catechist responds with a “brief” story from his or her life. See appendix #2 for an example.

- ▶ Where is metanoia needed in your own life?
- ▶ What are the areas of your life in which darkness take precedence over the light?

### Gospel: John 9: 1-41

Read or summarize the Gospel, perhaps provide a copy of the text for further reflection.

### Gospel Exegesis

Please note: catechist may intersperse the questions at the end of the exegesis throughout your presentation where appropriate.) Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions before presenting the exegesis.

- ▶ What specifically touched you in this Gospel?
- ▶ Jesus heals the man born blind from birth.
- ▶ Jesus contrasts the darkness he has been encountering with the *Light* he came to bring. The blind man stands in dark contrast to those who think

- they see but who are in truth blind.
- ▶ The backdrop of this story is the feast the Jews were celebrating called the Feast of Tabernacles that commemorated the settling of the Promised Land and the future hope for a messiah.
  - ▶ Booths were erected, water was poured on the corner of the altar as prayers were prayed that conjured images of living water and the light of the world.
  - ▶ The story today is one of the seven “signs” (miracles) of John’s Gospel. John used the term *signs*, as he understood them to be proof that Jesus was the promised messiah of sacred Scripture.
  - ▶ Jesus made a clay paste from his spittle and the dirt on the ground. He touched the eyes of the man blind from birth. Jesus told the man to go and wash in the pool from which the waters for the Feast of Tabernacles had just been drawn. The man was then able to see. His neighbors were dumbfounded.
  - ▶ Pharisees question the man and accuse Jesus of healing on the Sabbath. They approach the man’s parents. They are afraid of being expelled from the synagogue and send the Pharisees back to their son.
  - ▶ The man indicates that he is now a disciple of Jesus by telling the Pharisees that they should go and ask their questions of Jesus and perhaps they too would be compelled to follow him.
  - ▶ The blind man experienced healing of epic proportions that caused deep conversion in his life.
  - ▶ The Pharisees insist that God does not answer the prayers of sinners and Jesus is a sinner---so how could the man be healed?
  - ▶ It becomes obvious that Jesus is a prophet. Jesus is righteous. Jesus follows God’s will. God answers Jesus’ prayers in ways that have never been answered before. This is an awe-filled revelation.
  - ▶ The man is thrown out of the synagogue. Jesus looks for the man and what follows is an expression of faith and worship of Christ that reads like a baptismal liturgy. The blind man comes to *see* that light means salvation and sight.
  - ▶ Jesus challenged the Pharisees. He tells them that his mission is to bring light to those who cannot see. They are indignant. “Does Jesus presume to say that they cannot see?”
  - ▶ Jesus insists that people must first understand that they are blind if they want their sight restored. The Pharisees, in their self-righteous indignation believed themselves to be among those with sight.
  - ▶ The person who does not recognize their need for healing is hardly open to it when offered.
  - ▶ The miracle (the sign) of this story serves to provide Jesus with legitimacy and authority. It is a means of evangelization as it is a catalyst for bringing people to faith in him and it is a teachable moment that teaches the community about Jesus the *Light of the World*.





## Mystagogy

### reflection on the mysteries

Catechist invites participants to respond to the following questions in small groups of four. Use the last three or four minutes to surface the insights in the wider group. Catechist begins by sharing story from his or her life. See appendix #3 for an example. (@ Ten-twelve minutes)

- ▶ What is the primary message of this Gospel?
- ▶ What is your greatest blind spot in your life? In what way are you blind? In what way do you refuse to see?
- ▶ When (if ever) have you ever moved from blindness to sight?
- ▶ In what way are we as a church or society collectively blind?
- ▶ What is the challenge of this Gospel? In what way does it invite you to grow in faith and to be a better disciple?

Catechist invites participants to silently reflect on the following question.

- ▶ After reflection on today's liturgy, what one thing is God asking of you at this time in your life?
- ▶ What obstacles stand in the way of following God's call?
- ▶ In what way does this Gospel invite you more deeply into Christ's life, death and resurrection? (A good question for ongoing reflection in your journal throughout the week.)

## Concluding Prayer

If this is a catechumenal session, end the session with a minor rite—a blessing or minor exorcism, RCIA # 90-97.

### Prayer of Pope Clement XI

*Lord, I believe in you: increase my faith.  
I trust in you: strengthen my trust.  
I love you: let me love you more and more.  
I am sorry for my sins: deepen my sorrow.  
I worship you as my first beginning.  
I long for you as my last end.  
I praise you as my constant helper.  
And I call you as my loving protector.  
I want to do what you ask of me:  
In the way you ask, for as long as you ask, because you ask it.  
Let me love you Lord as my God.  
And see myself as I really am: a pilgrim in this world.  
A Christian called to respect and love all those lives I touch.*

## APPENDIX

1. Years ago my husband was offered a job in another city. We put our house on the market—a house we loved. We were a week from moving to the new city and his new boss decided he did not have the money to bring on a new associate and thus terminated my husband. People were ready to move into our house. We had to find a place to live quickly—a place that would take four kids and two dogs in a week's notice.

I thought God had abandoned us. “O ye of little faith!” We found one apartment complex that had an opening. We moved in and then went to the local parish to enroll our children in the Catholic school. When we arrived at the parish the newly assigned priest happened to be a friend of ours. We had worked together in the healing ministry in years past. He was getting ready to open a new parish nearby and much to our amazement offered me the job of music and liturgy director in the newly formed parish. The rest is history. I have been in fulltime parish ministry for the past thirty years.

God commissioned me for full time ministry in the church. His election was unexpected and certainly not merited. My job was to be willing to say, “Yes, Lord I will go.” I have been amazingly humbled and blessed by his call. I am thankful that this is one time I listened and said, “Yes.” Sometimes I refuse to listen. We can be thankful that the great saints in history (such as David) said “YES” to God's election.

2. It is so very easy to fall prey to my need to be right. Such need is steeped in arrogant pride. The media is so consumed with who is right and who is wrong on the political scene. Like vultures, they lie in wait to trap their unsuspecting victims. It is an addictive attitude that we/I all too easily assume. The dark can often come disguised as the light. I can think myself very righteous in following certain ideologies while demonizing those who differ with me.

This reading challenges me to turn away from such preoccupations. I am called not to be distracted by events over which I have no control. My job is to pray that the just, right and moral thing happens in our world. I am to be a voice for that just, righteous and moral thing, and then I am called to live in the light---to let it go. My commitment of late has been to occupy my mind and heart with things of God rather than things that constantly upset my spirit and my peace. My eyes have been opened to those things that distract me from following the course God has called me to follow.

3. At one point in my life I believed that my happiness was my husband's responsibility. If I was not happy, he was to blame; it was his job to make me happy! Absurd? Yes. But it was an insidious, unconscious attitude that crept into my life. Once my blindness was exposed I had to make a commitment to alter my attitude and way of relating. It was not easy.

I relate to the Pharisees in today's Gospel as it is very easy to feel exalted and privy to all the truths of the universe---to be among the converted who do not need God's saving power and refuse to see the blindness in my own life. It is one thing to recognize the blindness and quite another to seek healing and forgiveness. Only through the power of Christ, the Light of the World am I able to turn away from such dark behaviors and turn toward the light. It is a constant struggle.

We as a nation are blind to the ways we are responsible for causing oppression in other parts of the world—very often to further our own interests. We see nothing wrong with such behavior. Unjust wars have been fought and policies that adversely affect the poor have been set in motion. While we have much to commend ourselves for as a nation---we always rise to help our brothers and sisters ravaged by disaster, we nevertheless refuse to look at the areas of darkness—it almost seems unpatriotic to do so.

Jesus' challenge today is not just to individuals; it is also to a nation. We who are so blessed are called to open our eyes and see the ways we do not uphold the dignity of all people around the world. That can only happen if we stop seeing ourselves as always on the side of truth and right.





# Connecting Liturgy with Catholic Doctrine

Possible doctrinal themes that flow from this week's  
Liturgy of the Word and Eucharist

*Sacrament of Reconciliation*  
*Salvation*  
*Sacraments*

*Prayer*  
*Sin and Grace*

Other themes may be chosen as well--choose from the index of doctrinal topics and create your own connecting statement. The following statements make the appropriate connections between the doctrinal issue you have chosen and the liturgy of the day.

## SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION

Lent is a time we focus on the areas of sin in our lives and our need for God's mercy. It is also a time when the church offers multiple opportunities to celebrate the sacrament of reconciliation. The sacrament of reconciliation brings us out of the darkness into the Light of Christ. It extends God's mercy and the reconciling presence of Christ to us sinners. Today's doctrinal session will focus on the SACRAMENT OF RECONCILIATION.

## SALVATION

Today's liturgy is an invitation to acknowledge our need for salvation—to recognize that salvation is a process, that even though we can reject the salvation that is ours, we have a heavenly Father who is willing to go to any lengths to save us. We are all sinners in need of saving. We are all steeped in blindness until Christ heals us and restores our sight. Thus are we saved. Today's session will focus on SALVATION.

## SACRAMENTS

In today's Gospel Jesus inaugurates a sacramental sign. He anoints the blind man. He opens his eyes and his heart to the holy light of conversion. Sacraments continue Jesus' healing ministry. They are all sources of conversion and salvation. Today we will explore the church's teaching on sacraments.

## PRAYER

Lent is a time we devote to prayer, fasting and almsgiving. Jesus prays to his Father in heaven and people are healed. There is power in prayer. Lent is a time to focus on our need for prayer and to commit to the discipline of prayer in our lives. Today's extended session will focus on the Church's teaching regarding Prayer.

## SIN AND GRACE

Today's Gospel uncovers the sin of the self-righteous. Jesus is the Light of the World; we are given access to his grace—to Jesus Christ. Yet, still we are sinners in need of reconciling grace. Today's session will address sin, our need for God's mercy and the mercy given through the gift of God's self—GRACE. Our extended session will focus on Sin and Grace.